**A Positive Psychology update from Dr. Martin E. P. Seligman:**

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|  | **Flourish: A New Theory of Positive Psychology** **Martin E.P. Seligman** |  |

**Happiness Is Not Enough**  
    When I started my work in Positive Psychology, my original view was closest to Aristotle’s—that everything we do is done in order to make us happy—but I actually detest the word happiness, which is so overused that it has become almost meaningless. It is an unworkable term for science, or for any practical goal such as education, therapy, public policy, or just changing your personal life. Moreover, the modern ear immediately hears “happy” to mean buoyant mood, merriment, good cheer, and smiling. “Happiness” historically is not closely tied to such hedonics—feeling cheerful or merry is a far cry from what Thomas Jefferson declared that we have the right to pursue—and it is an even further cry from my intentions for a positive psychology.  
    To understand what “happiness” is really about, the first step is to dissolve “happiness” into more workable terms. When I wrote Authentic Happiness a decade ago, I thought that happiness could be analyzed into three different elements that we choose for their own sakes: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning. Positive emotion refers to what we feel: pleasure, rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort, and other such emotions that contribute to the “pleasant life.” Engagement is about flow: being one with the music, time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity, experiences which contribute to the “engaged life.” The third element is meaning. I go into flow while playing bridge, but after a long tournament, when I look in the mirror, I worry that I am fidgeting until I die. Human beings, ineluctably, want the “meaningful life”: belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than you are. Happiness and life satisfaction, I thought, could be increased by building positive emotion, engagement, and a sense of meaning in life.  
    This is not enough.  
    I no longer think that positive psychology is about happiness, or about a quest for increasing life satisfaction through positive emotion, engagement, and meaning. It turns out that how much life satisfaction people report is itself determined by how good we feel at the very moment we are asked the question. Averaged over many people, the mood you are in determines more than 70 percent of how much life satisfaction you report. If positive psychology is to be more than a “happiology” of cheerful mood, we need to shift our focus to well-being. I believe the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing. Flourishing rests on five pillars, each of which we value for its own sake, not merely as a means to some other end. Positive emotion, engagement, and meaning are three of the pillars, but they cannot do the “heavy lifting” of supporting human flourishing by themselves.  
   
**The Need to Achieve**  
    Accomplishment (or achievement) is often pursued for its own sake, even when it brings no positive emotion, no meaning, and nothing in the way of positive relationships. Here is what ultimately convinced me: I play a lot of serious duplicate bridge. I have played with and against many of the greatest players. Some expert bridge players play to improve, to solve problems, to be in flow, or to experience outright joy. Other experts play only to win. For them, losing is devastating no matter how well they played. Some will even cheat to win. It does not seem that winning for them reduces to positive emotion (many of the stonier experts deny feeling anything at all when they win and quickly rush on to the next game), nor does the pursuit reduce to engagement, since defeat nullifies the experience so easily. Nor is it about meaning; bridge is not about anything remotely larger than the self.  
    Winning only for winning’s sake can also be seen in the pursuit of wealth. In contrast to philanthropic millionaires, there are “accumulators” who believe that the person who dies with the most toys wins. Their lives are built around winning, and they do not give away their toys except in the service of winning more toys. So well-being theory requires a third element: the “achieving life,” dedicated to accomplishment for the sake of accomplishment.  
   
**Other People Matter**  
    Near the Portuguese island of Madeira, there lies a small island shaped like an enormous cylinder. At the top is a several-acre plateau on which are grown the most prized grapes that go into Madeira wine. On this plateau lives only one large animal: an ox whose job is to plow the field. There is only one way up to the top, a winding and narrow path. How in the world does a new ox get up there when the old ox dies? A baby ox is carried on the back of a worker up the mountain, where it spends the next forty years plowing the field alone. If you are moved by this story, ask yourself why.  
    Very little that is positive is solitary. When was the last time you laughed uproariously? The last time you felt indescribable joy? The last time you sensed profound meaning and purpose? The last time you felt enormously proud of an accomplishment? Even without knowing the particulars of these high points of your life, I know their form: all of them took place around other people. When asked what, in two words or fewer, positive psychology is about, Christopher Peterson, one of its founders, replies, “Other people.” Other people is the best antidote to the downs of life and the single most reliable up.  
    Recent streams of argument about human evolution point to the importance of positive relationships in their own right and for their own sake. Studies of the big social brain, the hive emotions, and group selection persuade me that positive relationships—key to “the connected life”—are a basic element of well-being.  
   
**Well-Being Theory: PERMA**  
    In the new well-being theory, human flourishing rests on five pillars, denoted by the handy mnemonic PERMA:  
    Positive Emotion  
    Engagement  
    Relationships  
    Meaning  
    Accomplishment  
    These elements, which we choose for their own sake in our efforts to flourish, are the rock-bottom fundamentals to human well-being. What is the good life? It is pleasant, engaged, meaningful, achieving, and connected.  
   
   
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